

Midwest Region National Wildlife Refuge System Workforce Plan 2007-2009

Summary

Rising personnel and operational costs coupled with relatively flat budgets for the National Wildlife Refuge System in the Midwest Region have forced us to relinquish 35 permanent field positions between 2005 and the end of 2006, a 10% workforce reduction. These budget pressures are expected to continue. In addition, keeping payroll costs from absorbing our needed operational funds requires an additional staffing reduction of 10% by the end of Fiscal Year 2009. A total of 71 positions will be lost by the end of FY 2009, absent new funding sources.

The loss of these 71 positions is a 20% reduction in the size of our field workforce, a loss that cannot be made up even with improved efficiencies and better collaboration between field stations.

These losses have already impacted the Midwest Region's accomplishments, and further performance impacts are expected.

The refuge program staff in the Midwest Regional Office has similarly been reduced, downsizing by 12% between the years 2004 to 2006.

January 11, 2007

Background

The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) is a field focused land management organization, responsible for the administration and management of 545 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge Program in the eight state Midwest Region is comprised of 54 National Wildlife Refuges, and 12 Wetland Management Districts.

The Refuge Program in the Midwest Region currently operates with a base annual budget of \$ 28.5 million. This budget covers the salaries of a permanent workforce of 322 field staff in FY 2006, and covers the costs of routine expenses such as heating, lighting, fuel, supplies, and other basic operational needs.

This workforce of 322 biologists, visitor services specialists, administrative officers, maintenance workers, and managers are the front line of conservation on National Wildlife Refuge System lands. Located in forty-six offices around the region, they monitor and improve habitat, inventory wildlife, host visitor programs, conduct law enforcement, collaborate with partners, and maintain boundaries, roads, trails and buildings. Staffs on refuges in the Midwest Region do a remarkable job of balancing the needs of wildlife while hosting over 7 million visitors each year.

Budget Pressures

After several years of increasing budgets leading up to the Refuge System centennial year of 2003, Refuge System appropriations leveled.

The recognition in FY 2004 that refuge operations and maintenance funding was not keeping pace with cost of living increases and inflation (US Department of Labor estimated 3.6% increase in consumer price increase from 2005 to 2006 in the Midwest states) prompted a tight hold on filling any vacated positions. From 2005 through 2006 35 field vacancies (over 10% of our field workforce) were left unfilled, using those salary savings to help defray increased operational costs on refuges throughout the region. These vacancies and resulting reductions occurred opportunistically as retirements or transfers occurred, posing a challenge to managers to ensure that highest priority work was accomplished. In spite of this tight position management, in FY 2006 the salary and benefit costs of our permanent workforce totaled 83% of our field stations base budgets, leaving only 17% for management capability (fuel, electricity, other fixed costs).

Refuge System leadership have a goal of achieving a budget ratio of 80% salary to 20% management capability, a ratio that ensures funding for basic operations, maintenance, and essential wildlife, habitat, and visitor services programs.

Operating Efficiencies and Cost Reductions

In addition to reducing the number of permanent positions, operating costs were reduced in several ways, for example:

- Several energy efficiency projects were funded to help reduce energy usage on field stations. For example, a ground water heating system was installed at Crab Orchard Refuge in Illinois reducing energy use in the headquarters office by 15%.
- Maintenance staffs have joined forces in various *Maintenance Action Teams* to get more done with less money. For example, at Ottawa Refuge in Ohio, a team completed an entrance road, parking and storm water storage for a new visitor center, saving close to \$ 600,000 in construction costs.
- Refuge and wetland management district biologists are coordinating inventory and monitoring procedures and projects, identifying more efficient and effective techniques.
- Collaborative adaptive management research projects on water level management and cattail control will help managers make wiser and more cost-effective habitat treatment decisions.
- Beginning in FY 2007, a change in travel rules will reduce the costs of moving permanent employees by 3-5%.
- Fire and Law Enforcement staffs cooperate in cross station activities more effectively than ever before, increasing the acres treated and visitors and resources protected, while reducing overall training and staff costs.
- New bunkhouse facilities enable a greater number of researchers, volunteers, and interns to stretch the duration and scope of their assistance to refuges.
- Co-located program staff (Migratory Birds, Realty, Refuges) in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, reduces lease costs.

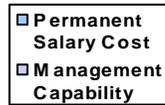
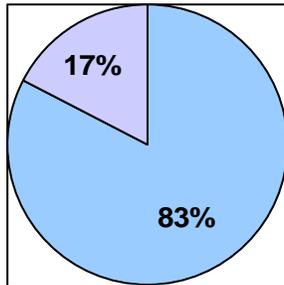
In spite of these and other cost containment measures, the largest part of field base budget expenses, permanent personnel salary and benefits, continues to outpace funding.

Pressures of Inflation

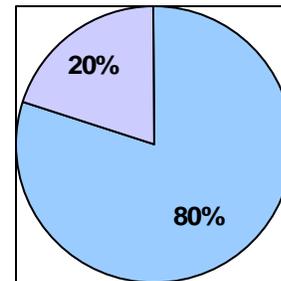
An analysis of cost increases for salary (+3% per annum) between 2007 to 2009, coupled with a management goal of hitting an 80: 20 ratio of salary to management capability leads to the difficult conclusion that absent new funding, an additional 36 positions must be abolished by FY 2009. This means an additional 10% reduction to the permanent workforce in the field.

Salary to Management Capability

Existing Budget



Budget at 80:20

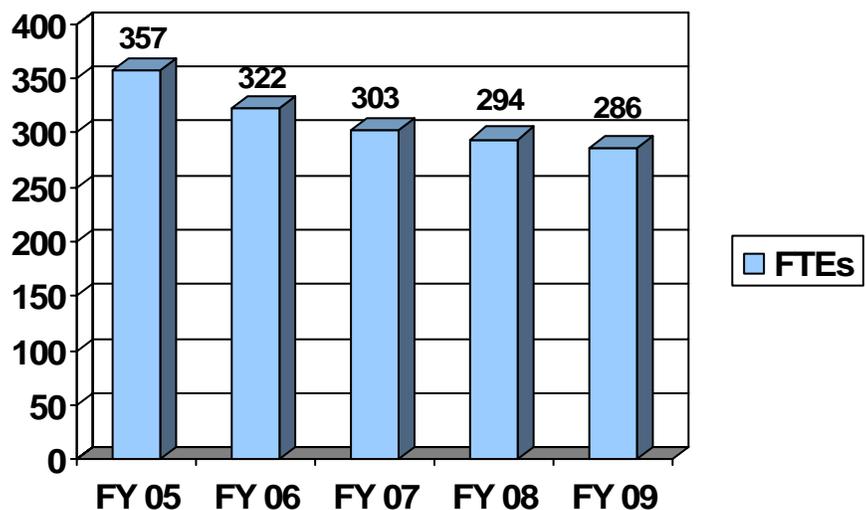


	Existing
Permanent Salary	\$ 23,480,000
Management Capability	\$ 4,975,000
Total Base	\$ 28,455,000

	At 80:20
Permanent Salary	\$ 22,764,000
Management Capability	\$ 5,691,000
Total Base	\$ 28,455,000

Staff Numbers

- At 80:20 Target \$22,764,00 is available to fund Permanent Staff
- Number staff afforded decreases each year.
- FY 2009 must be at 286 FTEs
- Average decrease 12 per year from FY 07 – FY 09



Position Management in the Field FY 2007-2009

The reductions of these additional 36 positions over the next three years (2007-2009) will be achieved by reducing 12 staff per year. These reductions will be made by eliminating the following positions, and reassigning staff where opportunities arise.

Planned Position Reductions FY 2007- 2009:

5	Park Rangers
8	Wildlife Biologists/ Biological Technicians
12	Refuge Operations Specialists/Managers
7	Administrative Officers/Secretaries
4	Maintenance Workers
====	
36	Positions to be reduced

Position Reductions = 20% of Workforce

Coupled with the existing loss of 35 positions that have already occurred since 2005, the reduction of these additional 36 positions means that National Wildlife Refuges and Wetland Management Districts in the Midwest Region will have lost 20% of its field work force over the 4 year period of 2006 through 2009. These losses are summarized in the following table.

Position Losses: Actual and Planned - FY 2005 through FY 2009

Illinois 9 positions 17% reduction 1 Manager/Res. Spec. 2 Park Rangers 1 Biologist/Bio. Tech 4 Maintenance Worker 1 Administrative Staff	Indiana 6 positions 38% reduction 1 Manager/Res. Spec. 2 Biologists/ Bio. Tech. 1 Maintenance Worker 2 Administrative Staff	Iowa 8 positions 15% reduction 3 Manager/Res. Spec. 3 Park Rangers 1 Biological Tech 1 Maintenance Worker	Michigan 4 positions 20% reduction 1 Manager/Res. Spec. 2 Park Rangers 1 Biologist/Bio. Tech
Minnesota 27 positions 20% reduction 9 Managers/Res. Spec. 6 Park Rangers 6 Biologists/Bio. Tech. 3 Maintenance Workers 3 Administrative Staff	Missouri 6 positions 18% reduction 2 Biologists/Bio. Tech. 1 Park Ranger 2 Maintenance Workers 1 Administrative Staff	Ohio 1 position 10% reduction 1 Maintenance Worker	Wisconsin 10 positions 25% reduction 3 Managers/Res. Spec. 1 Park Rangers 4 Biologists/Bio.Tech. 1 Maintenance Worker 1 Administrative Staff

Responding with Innovation: Operational Zones

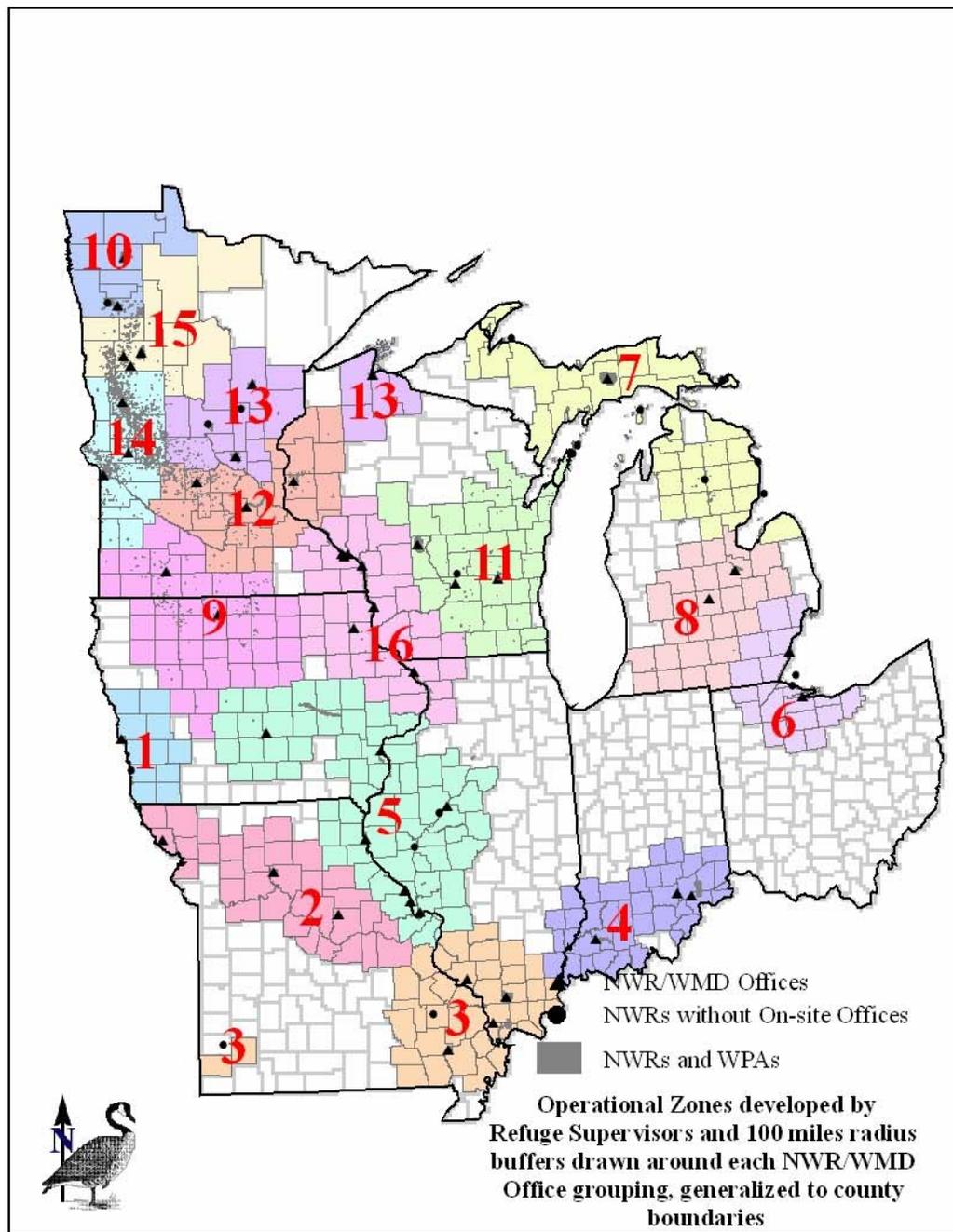
While our field managers responded with creativity and flexibility, important work will go undone. More than ever before, field stations collaborate with one another, sharing staff and equipment to assure that their most important habitat, maintenance, or visitor services projects are completed. Modeled after the successful zoning of fire and law enforcement staffs, managers in the Midwest Region are implementing an Operational Zone organization in which field stations in geographic proximity to one another discuss and agree on projects of highest priority within their combined Operational Zone, and work to share staff and equipment. These Zones are not organizational layers, no supervisory relationship between field managers is established; rather, the Zones are collaborative teams that rely on cooperation and communication.

Managers who have sustained staff losses look to their Zone colleagues for assistance; they help each other when called, and call each other when help is needed. This arrangement works with managers who have a clear understanding of their own station priorities, and trust in the priority setting of their neighbors.

In the Midwest Region, Refuge and Wetland District managers have formed 16 operational zones.

1 Boyer Chute DeSoto	2 Squaw Creek Swan Lake Big Muddy	3 Crab Orchard Cypress Creek Middle Mississippi Mingo Ozark Cavefish Pilot Knob	4 Big Oaks Muscatatuck Patoka River	5 Chautauqua Emiquon Mark Twain HQ Meredosia Neal Smith Port Louisa Clarence Cannon Great River Two Rivers
6 Cedar Point Detroit River Ottawa West Sister Island	7 Harbor Island Huron Island Kirtlands Warbler Michigan Islands Seney	8 Michigan WMD Shiwassee	9 Iowa WMD Union Slough Windom	10 Agassiz Glacial Ridge Rydell
11 Fox River Gravel Island Green Bay Island Horicon Leopold WMD Necedah	12 Litchfield WMD Minnesota Valley St. Croix WMD	13 Whittlesey Creek Crane Meadows Mille Lacs Rice Lake Sherburne	14 Big Stone WMD Big Stone Morris WMD Fergus Falls WMD	15 Detroit Lakes WMD Hamden Slough Tamarac
16 Trempealeau Upper Mississippi River NW & FR Driftless Area				

Region 3 Operational Zones



Map produced courtesy of Division of Conservation Planning, Region 3
Twin Cities, Minnesota (612) 713-3390
Created: July, 2006

Why Not Complexes in the Midwest Region?

Other Regions of the Service have looked to make hierarchical changes, creating a ‘complex’ of stations, to facilitate the shifting of staff and resources between refuges. In a complex, several refuge units are combined under one headquarters office, an office that usually grows in size and distance from the resources the refuge was initially established to protect and manage.

Experience with complex offices in the Midwest Region has shown that staffs in complex offices are often higher graded than the staffs of the prior stand-alone refuges. Instead of reducing costs, the complex office may actually be more expensive. Span of control and responsibility for managers can grow beyond an individual’s capability, with a resulting loss of attention to employee and resource issues. In addition, as refuges are reformed into a complex, individual refuge units lose identity and individual recognition. And, as refuges lose identity, they may lose the support from their local community. Volunteer and Friends groups, who have a loyalty and pride in their refuge, find it harder to support geographically anonymous complex offices.

Refuge Tiering:

To facilitate workforce planning, Refuge Field Stations in the Midwest Region were categorized into one of three groups or “Tiers.” Each Tier was defined based on a number of characteristics including current staffing, variability in size, location, habitat resources, degree of complexity (e.g., interagency projects, infrastructure, etc.) and actual performance, as measured by the Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP). Although RAPP data are relatively new to the Refuge System, these data were incorporated in workforce planning to ensure proper ranking and recognition of those highly productive habitat management and visitor services programs which contribute substantially to the Refuge System’s Strategic Goals and the Department’s Operational Plan.

For example, Tier 1 stations make up 17% of the refuge field stations in the Midwest Region, but contribute over 50% of the performance accomplishments in many key performance measures. Tier 1 stations provide 56% and 55% respectively of the regional total acres of upland and wetland habitat management (measure 1.05, 1.06), 70% of wetland acres restored, and 75% of all refuge visitation.

While every refuge contributes to fulfilling the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, categorizing stations into tiers helps clarify where staff reductions will be least impacting, and helps guide our workforce planning.

Tier 1 Field Stations

Tier 1 Field Stations are highly complex units of the Refuge System that have extensive habitat management and visitor services activities making significant contributions to achieving the five goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (601 FW 1) and the 12 strategic outcome goals identified in the Strategic Plan for the National Wildlife Refuge System (FY 2006 – 2010). These stations typically have large land holdings, diverse habitats, host a variety of high priority fish and wildlife species, and offer extensive visitor service programs such as Environmental Education. Tier 1 stations often have a full-range of expert staff in a variety of management disciplines.

Tier 2 Field Stations

Tier 2 Field Stations are staffed units of the Refuge System that make important contributions to the goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System and many of the goals of the Strategic Plan. These units typically offer some level of visitor service programming such as wildlife interpretation and special events. Tier 2 stations usually have staff that covers the basic areas of refuge management and maintenance. These Field Stations may ultimately become Tier 1 stations when fully acquired or developed, and may have highly complex and sometimes controversial management challenges.

Tier 3 Field Stations

Tier 3 Field Stations are unstaffed units (or will become unstaffed with planned reductions) of the Refuge System that are not of a size that require extensive habitat management to achieve wildlife objectives. While these Field Stations may contain important habitat for threatened or endangered species, daily oversight or management is not required. These stations may be opened to public-use activities, but do so on a self-directed or infrequent basis. These Field Stations are typically managed by staff from nearby Tier 1 or Tier 2 Field Stations. As a Tier 3 station grows in size, it is possible that it will become a Tier 2 or Tier 1 station.

Tier 1 Refuges/WMDs	Tier 2 Refuges/WMDs	Tier 3 Refuges/WMDs
Agassiz Crab Orchard DeSoto Detroit Lakes Fergus Falls Mingo Minnesota Valley Morris Necedah Ottawa Upper Mississippi River	Big Muddy Big Oaks Big Stone Chautauqua (Illinois River) Cypress Creek Detroit River Glacial Ridge Great River (Clarence Cannon) Horicon Iowa WMD Leopold Litchfield Middle Mississippi Muscatatuck Neal Smith	Big Stone WMD Cedar Point Crane Meadows Driftless Area Emiquon Fox River Gravel Island Green Bay Island Hamden Slough Harbor Island Huron Island Kirtlands Warbler Meredosia Michigan Islands Michigan WMD

	Tier 2 Refuges/ WMDs. Continued:	Tier 3 Refuges/WMDs Continued:
	Patoka River Port Louisa Rice Lake Rydell Seney Sherburne Shiawassee Squaw Creek St. Croix Swan Lake Tamarac Trempealeau Two Rivers Union Slough Whittlesey Creek Windom	Mille Lacs MN Valley WMD Northern Tallgrass Prairie Ozark Cavefish Pilot Knob Tamarac WMD West Sister Island

Operational Reductions from Lost Staff

In spite of the innovations and efficiencies that field and regional office staffs are able to achieve, the loss of 20% of the field workforce makes a significant impact in providing for wildlife and visitors.

Staff reductions in Tier 1 stations will likely result in an overall reduction of approximately 15% across all performance measures that require active maintenance, habitat management or visitor services personnel.

Tier 2 stations will bear the brunt of the staff reductions (over half of the staff reductions occur on Tier 2 stations), resulting in an anticipated average loss of 20% of output measures requiring active management.

Three stations (Crane Meadows, Driftless Area, and Hamden Slough), because of loss of staff, will move from Tier 2 status joining the list of un-staffed Tier 3 stations. Some active maintenance, habitat management, or visitor use programs will be curtailed at these Tier 3 stations. And, while refuge policies regarding access and public use are not anticipated to change as a result of this plan, the loss of performance due to lack of staffing is unavoidable. Currently, Tier 3 refuges contribute approximately 3 to 4% of the regional habitat management and visitor services output goals.

Specific output impacts vary from station to station, and from state to state, but can be illustrated by the following examples of stations which have already lost staff, and how their operational plan outputs were reduced between FY 2005 and the end of FY 2006. We can no longer do more, with less.

Region-wide, the 10% loss in field staff from 2005 – 2006 contributed to a decline in the accomplishments of several key performance plan measures, for example:

- 3 % fewer acres were treated for invasive species than was projected at the start of the year.
- 15% fewer wetland acres received needed management than was projected at the start of the year.
- 12% fewer riparian miles received needed management than was planned at the start of the year.
- 6.5 % fewer acres of uplands were restored than planned.
- 26% fewer people participated in environmental education programs than was planned.

Refuge specific examples clearly demonstrate how staff reductions cause a decline in visitor services and habitat improvements. Additional declines in performance outputs can be expected as field staffs are reduced. A sampling of how the staff reductions affected field station accomplishments:

- Minnesota Valley Refuge, in Minnesota, experienced a drop by 13% in the number of environmental education students participating in programs, a 5% overall drop in visitor center visitation, and 50% drop in the number of resource violations investigated. These losses are directly attributable to a loss of 2 park rangers from the staff between 2005 and 2006.
- Big Oaks Refuge in Indiana treated 21% fewer acres for invasive species control because they lost a wildlife biologist to direct this activity.
- Neal Smith Refuge in Iowa offered 40% fewer special visitor programs because of a loss of a park ranger.
- Shiawassee Refuge in Michigan managed 11% fewer wetland acres than planned because of a loss of a biological technician.
- Fergus Falls Wetland Management District in Minnesota experienced a drop by 4% in the number of upland acres getting needed management treatments, the result of a loss of an equipment operator.
- Morris Wetland Management District in Minnesota saw a decline by 15% in the number of wetland acres receiving needed management, a decline attributed to the loss of a biological technician.

Implementing the Workforce Plan

The loss of approximately 12 positions per year over the next three years will be accomplished without the use of reduction in force authority. A normal rate of attrition of approximately 5% of the workforce each year through retirements, resignations, and transfers, will provide enough management flexibility to reach downsizing targets. There are some indications that retirement rates may even be increasing. While these created vacancies will not all be in the targeted positions or stations, they should create enough elasticity in workforce management within each operational zone to enable the Region to reach its targets by the end of FY 2009.

Several examples of where managers have used position vacancies to realign staff to accomplish higher priority work illustrate this approach to workforce management and planning. In addition, creative use of partnerships and student career employment hiring authorities are workforce management tools that help managers meet planning targets.

- An assistant refuge manager position was converted to park ranger to focus on providing quality visitor services programming for the over 400,000 annual visitors to the Savanna District of the Upper Mississippi River NW&FR.
- A biological technician vacancy at Trempealeau Refuge was converted to a park ranger position to focus on providing quality visitor services programs for the 50,000 annual visitors to the refuge.
- An assistant refuge management position at Trempealeau was left vacant and the FTE used to fill a biologist position at Winona District of Upper Mississippi River NW&FR to provide biological expertise.
- An administrative technician at the Mark Twain Complex office was left vacant and the FTE used to fill a biological technician position at the new Middle Mississippi River NWR, to provide biological and management capability at a refuge with only one employee.
- The Student Career Education Program (SCEP) is used to identify and recruit potential equipment operators and maintenance staff. By using the SCEP program we are creating a feeder pool of mobile, entry level wage grade staff to fill the numerous vacancies that are occurring as our existing wage grade staffs reach retirement age.
- A cooperative agreement with the Ecological Careers Organization (ECOS) provides us with an outstanding recruitment tool to find diverse and talented students interested in environmental careers. We use the ECOS program to provide us with a pool of 10-15 summer interns each year. We use this intern season as a screening period to identify potential candidates for our SCEP intake into refuge biological, visitor services, and management positions.

Position Management in the Regional Office

The Refuge Management team in the Midwest Regional Office has a history of being a lean, field focused organization that supports over 66 National Wildlife Refuges and Wetland Management Districts in an eight state region. Operating with the highest ratio of field to regional office staff of any in the nation, the emphasis has been and remains on providing field stations with support and technical expertise where needed, while staying out of the way of innovation and day-to-day management of front line operations.

Efficiency of Operations:

From FY 2004 to the present, the Regional Office refuge management divisions have reduced in size from 34 to 30 permanent resource-funded staff. We reduced the number of Refuge Supervisors (second line managers who directly supervise refuge managers in the field) in the Regional Office from 3 to 2, and moved both an assistant refuge

supervisor and wildlife biologist from the regional office to fill field vacancies. As we continue to implement our Regional Office 10% realignment plan, we will achieve further reductions by eliminating a regional outdoor recreation planner position. The realignment of staff and salary from this 10% Regional Office downsizing will not make a significant impact on helping field stations stay strong.

Regional Office Positions Reduced since FY 04:

Refuge Supervisor
 Assistant Refuge Supervisor
 Wildlife Biologist
 Refuge Planner

Support of Innovation:

Field station innovation is encouraged. For example, staff and school leaders at the Fergus Falls Wetland Management developed the highly successful Prairie Science Class, a remarkable environmental education partnership between the local school district and the Service in which five, fifth grade classes spend half a day all year long on a waterfowl production area and our classrooms, a complete fusion of fifth grade core curricula with environmental learning. Managers learned from this successful model of environmental education delivery the need to refocus environmental education efforts away from staff intensive one or half day long school ‘field trips.’ Instead, refuges will focus staff efforts on a few stations where there is higher likelihood of working more in partnership with local school districts to create other ‘science schools’ on refuges.

Maintenance Action Teams were established and the Region’s field heavy equipment coordinator planned and scheduled the sharing of equipment and staff between refuges, creating temporary refuge-employee construction crews that concentrate on complex projects that would otherwise be impossible for a station to complete on its own.

The Midwest Region collaborated with the Northeast Region and USGS biologists to fund and create a biological monitoring and inventory team that is co-located with the USGS Upper Midwest Environmental Science Center. Through this collaboration, managers ensure that habitat management decisions are based on the best adaptive management principles and science. In addition, field station biologists have grouped themselves into ‘biological networks’, and are helping each other identify the most important habitat and population survey and monitoring activities, and eliminating the least important.

Field Focused:

Regional office staff strive to relieve pressures on field stations in areas where complex data systems or processes are best handled in a central organization. For example, the Regional Office Conservation Planning staffs provide the bulk of the muscle in getting plans written, and data collected, leaving the field station staffs the tasks of identifying

issues and envisioning strategies. As a result, the Midwest Region is on track to complete all plans by the legislated deadline. Other examples include taking the burden of completing real property inventories and condition assessments off the field and completing them in the regional office, and in pulling some of the most onerous parts of the Service Asset Maintenance Management System work out of the field and into the regional office.

Workforce Plan Summary

The rising cost of salary and increased operational costs have squeezed our capability to manage the refuge system to the point where we must reduce the number of permanent staff. Without new funding sources we must reduce 71 field positions between FY 2005 and FY 2009. These staff losses will mean reduced habitat improvements, and reduced visitor services. Regional Office reductions do not make a significant impact on sustaining field operations. Additional base allocations will be required to forestall this degradation of refuge operations.